

THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

BY

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THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

by

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ABSTRACT

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Religious traditions, values and beliefs have ignited wars as well helped to maintain peace. Religion and faith have influence on the rules of engagement in military operations. The success of a mission may hinge on a commander's ability to understand the influence of religion and faith can have on the mission. This research paper will explore how religion may impact the rules of engagement in the area of military operations. Further, the paper argues that it is the Soldiers' belief system that impacts how he/she implements the appropriate rules of engagement. Different religious values, professional ethics, circumstances and traditions may impact the rules of engagement. In addition, Army chaplains must continue to train at all levels to have an understanding of how religion may impact military operations. This will allow chaplains to provide timely and relevant information to commanders in the area of military operation.

THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION ON THE RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

Mohandas Gandhi said once, “I considered myself a Hindu, Christian, Moslem, Jew, Buddhist, and Confucian.”¹ Regardless if it is Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism or the Buddhist religion being discussed, many important questions surface to the forefront, especially as they pertain to the influence on military operations. There are some who would argue religion and faith have influence on the rules of engagement in military operations. Religious traditions, values and beliefs have ignited wars as well as helped to maintain peace. World religion has played a role in national and international politics. Religion has served as a motivation for economic, ethnic, political or psychological needs. Throughout history people have been afraid of religion. Perhaps many are fearful of its power and influence. This fear of religion continues to exist in the 21st Century. These are just a few important thoughts to be considered when studying the power of religion and its influence in the area of military operations.

During a course lecture, Professor Marc Gopin of the Institute of Conflict Analysis and Resolution, George Mason University said to his students, “Every religion has a broad range of cultural resources and values that have formed the basis of personal and communal values that prevent or successfully manage conflict.”² There is a need to better understand the role that world religions play in international conflicts and military operations. “Religion and culture unquestionably play a critical role in numerous conflicts, all the way from intrapersonal to global conflicts. The challenge is trying to tease out the subtle way in which religion and culture interact with conflict.”³ Historically, religion has played a major role in igniting war and violence as well as bringing peace to conflicts. Understanding religious values, culture and the world view is important in discovering how world religion can impact war and violence in military operations.

One of the objectives of this paper is to provide an overview of rules of engagement in understanding religious values and cultural influences. Also, this paper will argue that it is the Soldiers' belief system that impacts how he/she implements the appropriate rules of engagement. Finally, the researcher will explore the role of the chaplain in advising the commander on religious issues in operational areas.

“Although religion should never be a source of conflict, it is today clear that many, if not all, armed conflicts have religious undertones, and it is widely recognized as the major source of domestic and international conflict in the Post-Cold War world.”⁴ The reality is that religion has power and influence. Religion can have tremendous implications on U.S. National Security.

The Institute of National Security Ethics and Leadership Senior Military Fellow Chaplain (COL)

Eric Wester pointed out:

For at least a decade, diplomats and the military have begun to re-engage with religion, exploring the role religion plays in statecraft and military operations. The religions of indigenous populations and the religions of faith-based organizations operating in a commander's Area of Responsibility are all part of the operational environment. Religion has become an increasingly prominent and discrete dimension of our military engagements around the world, whether those engagements are combat operations or humanitarian efforts.⁵

The influence of religion on military operations cannot be ignored or overemphasized.

When it comes to military operations, insight on cultural and religious practices may prove to be critical to the mission. With this in mind, it is incumbent that military and political leaders continue to study the impact that religion has on war, violence, and peace. In his book, *Religion, The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, Douglas Johnston wrote, “foreign policy in the United States, for example, are often inadequately equipped to deal with situations involving other nation-states where the imperatives of religious doctrine blend intimately with those of

politics and economics.”⁶ This statement reinforces the importance of examining the positive and negative potential that religion has on conflicts.

Rules of Engagement

Society has prescribed rules to guide the conduct of its citizens. Likewise, military conflicts have established procedures or rules of engagement that provide guidance for the conduct of military personnel. Throughout U.S. military history, Soldiers have been governed by some kind of rules of engagement. For instance, during the Civil War, “in April 1863, after it had been approved by a panel of generals, President Abraham Lincoln approved the “Lieber Code.” It was finally published as General Order 100 in May 1863.”⁷ The Lieber Code prohibited Soldiers from using poison or torturing surrendering Soldiers. Rules of engagement are critical to the conduct of operations by military forces. “Rules of Engagement (ROE) are defined as directives issued by competent military authority which delineate the circumstances and limitations under which US forces will initiate and/or continue combat engagement with forces encountered.”⁸ The most widespread and most accepted rules of engagement (ROE) exist within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and are generally designed as operational rules for commanders of battalion-level and larger forces.

These rules of engagement are necessary to avoid escalations and to prevent moral fiasco such as the “My Lai Massacres.” This tragic and notorious incident took place on March 16, 1968 when a combat task force from the 11th Light Infantry Brigade of the 23d Infantry Division assaulted by helicopter into the village complex of Son My, in the province of Quang Ngai, South Vietnam. The American forces found only unarmed civilian women, children, and old men, rather than the anticipated large force of enemy soldiers. Despite no resistance, some members of the task force began to gather civilians and massacre them, under the direction of

several junior officers. American troops put more than 200 of the villagers to death during the killing spree. The “My Lai Massacre” illustrates a violation of international law and ROE. In the conduct of military operations U.S. Soldiers must make every effort to avoid injury to noncombatants. Both Protocol I and II to the 1949 Geneva Conventions both include targeting and protecting civilians. They prohibit “violence to life, health and physical or mental well-being, murder or cruel treatment.”⁹ The officers and Soldiers involved in the My Lai Massacre failed miserably in executing ROE. Further, it is safe to assume that an incident like this could have a significant impact on national security and government policies.

The rules of engagement are the primary means in which a commander conveys the legal and military requirements to the Soldiers within the unit. For this guidance to be achievable, commanders must manufacture rules of engagement that will foster a relationship of respect and trust among the local population. In military conflicts, ROE determine when, where, and how force shall be used. Further, the ROE determine how to respond after an attack, how to treat captured targets, which territories the Soldier are required to fight in, and how the force should be used during the operation. Additionally, it is important that the ROE are understood so that Soldiers can make a timely and correct decision in extremely stressful situations. The success of the conflict and the protection of national interests are enhanced by appropriate rules of engagement. “They provide a consistent, understandable and repeatable standard on how forces act.”¹⁰

The law of armed conflict, operational, political, diplomatic and religion/faith are just a few factors that influence ROE. There is a strong possibility that during the course of a military operation, the factors may overlap. How these factors will influence the ROE, may very well depend on the military situation. Further, the ROE will have an impact on the political purpose

of the mission. “The political purpose of ROE is simply to ensure military course of action are in coherence with political intentions and minimize the chance of undesired escalation or reactions.”¹¹ The military purpose of ROE provides guidelines to the commander on how much force should be used to achieve the mission. “Within this context, ROE must not interfere with the military force’s right and responsibility to self-defense. The legal purpose is to give the commander operational guidance to complete the mission within the constraints of national and international law.”¹²

Along with these factors the influence of religion is one of the most important components when studying the ROE. The influence of religion on ROE may prevent horrible consequences, such as the extermination of thousands and the ruin of an entire community. Religion may very well affect how women, children, the elderly and prisoners are treated or protected on the battlefield.

The Influence of Religion on the Rules of Engagement

One of the main goals of this paper is to explore the influence of religion on ROE. Of course, there are numerous examples throughout the pages of history that can be used to demonstrate how religion has played a role in causing conflicts. However, prior to addressing how a religion influences the ROE, it is important to show the role that religion has played in conflicts. The Crusades of the 11th, 12th and 13th Centuries and The Nigerian Civil War will serve as examples to demonstrate the role religion has played in conflict.

The crusades of the 11th, 12th and 13th Centuries were religious military campaigns. The Crusades were fought mainly by Roman Catholic forces against Muslims. The Christians were trying to restore control of the Holy Land from Muslim rule. One of the most well known figures of the Crusades was King Richard the Lionhearted. He was one of the greatest warriors and champions for the Christian cause. Nine hundred years ago, a vast Christian army rampaged

through the Muslim world of the eastern Mediterranean, seizing possession of Jerusalem.

Thomas Asbridge gave the following account regarding the crusades,

In a wider sense, the Field of Blood was a deeply unsettling shock for Latin Christendom...In the afterglow of the 'miraculous' First Crusade, earlier setbacks had already cast their shadow: the collapse of the 1101 Crusade; Baldwin I's defeat in the second Battle of Ramla; the mauling at Harran...If holy war truly was the work of God, sanctioned and empowered by His divine will, then how could defeat be explained? The answer was sin-success for Islam in the war for dominion of the Levant was a punishment.¹³

The Crusades demonstrate how religion and culture unquestionably play a critical role in conflict.

The Nigerian Civil War, which occurred from 1967 to 1970, provides a more modern example of the role religion plays in conflict. The Nigerian Civil War was the result of economic, ethnic, cultural and religious differences among the Nigerian people. The people were concentrated in one of the traditional regions, North, West and the East:

The large, predominately Muslim, Northern Region dwarfed the other two regions in size, however, with more than three-quarters of Nigeria's territory and more than half of its total population. Thus, the North dominated Nigerian politics in the post independence civilian government. At the same time, the mixed Christian-Muslim-animist and, especially, the predominantly Christian Eastern Region surpassed the North in education, and representation in the civil service and upper ranks of the military.¹⁴

Ethnic and religious tensions remained a constant feature of Nigerian politics. The war cost a great deal in terms of lives. Millions of people died due to the conflict, mostly from hunger and disease. The Crusades and the Nigerian Civil War are primarily examples of the role of religion in conflict.

On the grand scheme of things, religion has played a pivotal role in conflict. But, what about religions influence on and in the area of operations? Certainly, there is a need to understand more clearly the way that religion can shape and influence the ROE in the operational

area. It is important to examine how religion impacts the Soldier who eats, lives, breaths and fights on the battlefield. A truce between German and British soldiers in World War I and the first Palestinian Intifada illustrates the influence of religion on the ROE.

The First World War was a major war centered on Europe that began in the summer of 1914. It was a war in which 116,516 U.S. military personnel lost their lives. When the war began in the summer of 1914, Soldiers on both sides were certain that they would be home to celebrate the Christmas holiday. The Soldiers did not make it home for Christmas and the war did not come to an end until 1918. However, during the early stages of the war, in particular Christmas Eve December 1914, one of the most unusual events took place in military history. It was an extremely cold and freezing Christmas Eve night. The German and British soldiers laid down their weapon and harmonized the Christmas Carol, Silent Night. The Germans, who celebrated Christmas, extended Christmas greetings to their enemies.

British sentries reported to commanding officer there seemed to be a small light raised on bayonets... Within moments of the sighting, the British began hearing a few German soldiers singing a Christmas Carol. It was soon picked up along the German lines as other soldiers joined in the harmonizing. The words heard were these: "Stille nacht, heilige nacht." British troops immediately recognized the melody as "Silent Night" quickly neutralized all hostility on both sides. One by one, British and German soldiers began laying down their weapons to venture into no-man's-land, a small patch of bomb out earth between the two sides... There was an undeclared truce and peace broke out.¹⁵

During this brief truce, enemy soldiers laid down their weapons, shared food, and discussed their families and exchange gifts. On the morning of December 26, the war was on again. The truce ended just as it began, by mutual agreement. On that Christmas Eve night 1914, Soldiers who only hours before were trying to kill one another, paused to celebrate one of the most sacred religious holidays of the Christian faith. If for no other time in military history, religion caused enemy soldiers to lay down their weapons and stop the war.

The incident involving the German and British Soldiers in World War I demonstrated the positive impact that religion can have on the rules of engagement primarily from a Christian perspective. However, the Palestinian Intifada which occurred from 1987 to 1993 demonstrated how religion can impact the rules of engagements in the Arab-Muslim communities. The First Intifada came when Palestinians were protesting against Israel acts that they regarded as brutal. During this six year conflict, the Israeli army killed more than one thousand Palestinians and thousands more Palestinians were arrested during the six year conflict.

Nevertheless, even in the midst of the tragedies of this conflict, an incident which took place in February 1989 demonstrated how religion can influence the rules of engagement. This situation involved an Israeli soldier and a Palestinian youth after a rock throwing incident. During the chase, the young Palestinian was shot and killed by Israeli soldiers. In the book, *Nonviolence and Peace Building in Islam: Theory and Practice* the author wrote the following about this episode: “One of the Israeli soldiers soon found himself separated from his team and surrounded by a group of angry Palestinians. Afraid, the Israeli soldier found refuge in one of the local homes. The woman hid the frightened Israeli soldier and served him coffee until the angry mob was dispersed.”¹⁶ The woman who received the Israeli soldier was the mother of the young Palestinian boy whom the Israeli soldiers had shot and killed.

Furthermore regarding the incident between the Israeli soldier and the young boy, a question was asked to a group of Palestinians, What role did religion play in their struggle? The author of *Nonviolence and Peace Building in Islam: Theory and Practice* wrote the following response. “Ahmad, the host, replied, Religion and custom enable us to preserve our humanity. Ahmad was asked to elaborate, this is why nonviolence is important to us. We will never become like the Israelis and hate our enemies; we will offer him hospitality. That soldier could

come back again, and that woman would offer him coffee again.”¹⁷ The Palestinian woman could have retaliated, but she offered the soldier safety instead. She showed a great deal of restraint. This restraint occurred, because the Palestinians saw their enemies as human beings. “In the Islam tradition, constraints on the conduct of war can be traced back to pre-Islamic “rules of the game” of intertribal warfare. These rules forbade fighting during certain periods of the year and condemned excessive destruction, reflecting both a code of honor that protected the weak—women, children, the aged, and prisoners.”¹⁸ These rules were influenced by the morality of the Quran.

The truce between German and British soldiers in World War I and the death of a Palestinian youth during the Palestinian Intifada illustrates several points. These incidents represent the importance of understanding religion and its link with customs. These events show the strength of a soldiers’ faith, regardless of their diverse ethnic, social and religious background. Further, these military experiences should encourage commanders at all levels and political leaders never to undervalue the influence of religion on ROE in the area of operations. Additionally, these stories demonstrate how religion can serve as a catalyst to bring about peace on the battlefield. Finally, the truce between German and British soldiers suggests coalition’s forces may share the same religion, faith and ethics as U.S. Forces. “If humanity is to survive and avoid new catastrophes, then the global political order has to be accompanied by a sincere and mutual respect among the various spheres of civilization, culture, nations, or continents, and by efforts on their part to seek and find the values or basic moral imperatives they have in common.”¹⁹ The Army’s operational culture of the 21st Century must learn that right conduct on the battlefield now matters more than anything else.

A Matter of the Consciousness

“Religion is commonly believed to be the root of most, if not all, morals and ethics within most philosophical and societal systems.”²⁰ This implies that religion guides an individual virtues and morals. Why is this significant? “It is today commonly believed that competition between religions is a source of hostility and hatred in the world.”²¹ This competition of religions could create a clash of convictions, of which both sides are convinced of being right. During an event at the Heritage Foundation on January 12, 2011, the honorable James L. Buckley, a former U.S. Senator and Under the Secretary of State under President Ronald Reagan, said to the audience “virtues and morals are shaped by religion.”²² This was in response to the question of, “Why are so many leaders afraid of the power and influence of religion?” Clearly, this response by the honorable James L. Buckley supported the idea that religion has influence on the individual values and beliefs.

Religion is one of those factors that assist Soldier in appropriately executing the ROE. The cadets at West Point are taught the Old Cadet Prayer, “to do the harder right than the easier wrong.”²³ For many people who serve in the military their belief system is informed by ethics, values and religion. A Soldier’s ethics, values and religion may influence how a soldier executes the rules of engagement in combat. Even though the ROE say one thing, it is the soldiers’ belief systems that impact how he/she implements the appropriate rules of engagement and resolves a dilemma on the battlefield.

Understanding the impact that religion has on a soldier’s value system may avoid moral fiasco, when executing the ROE. Abu Ghraib was a horrible and shameless incident that occurred during the Iraq War. This incident gain international notoriety. The awful events of Abu Ghraib left an ugly mark upon the U.S. Army. In April 2004, “the whole world was

shocked when the American news media released the graphic photographs of U.S. Army soldiers caught in the act of torturing and humiliating Iraqi detainees at the U. S. run Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. This scandal was a tremendous setback for the United States government because the U.S. has always insisted that its military play the game by the rules (i.e. Geneva Conventions).²⁴ In the book, *War, Peace and Christianity: Questions and Answers from A Just-War Perspective*, the author wrote, “Every action or activity is first that of a responsible or irresponsible individual and must be initiated from personal values and beliefs; theist, this must be initiated in the fear of God. The actions of our hands always flow from the attitudes of our hearts.”²⁵ In other words, a conscience influenced by faith empowers a Soldier’s commitment, enables courage and defines character. Most importantly, it is faith plus conscience that enables a Soldier to make the appropriate decision when carrying out the ROE. Chaplain (LTC) Darrell Thomsen, refers to the spiritual as the, Human Spiritual Domain. He wrote, “a human being is comprised of three parts - domains called the physical, mental and the spiritual.”²⁶ Each of these domains has an influence on the individual’s attitude, which may influence one's decision making.

To be certain, the Army needs Soldiers who at all times will make the right decision on the battlefield. “The Army must develop Soldiers who have the autonomy and capacity to challenge unethical decisions and address ethical dilemmas regardless of the will of their subordinates, peers, or superiors.”²⁷ Again, the My Lai massacre in Vietnam and the Abu Ghraib abuses in Iraq illustrate the atrocities that occur when Soldiers fail to challenge unethical decisions by peers and superiors. “Soldiers do not have the option to recognize moral wrongdoing and then fail to take action. Soldiers with well developed sense of moral agency are better able to recognize the moral implications present in a situation, determine the right thing to

do, take responsibility, and summon the courage to do the right thing.”²⁸ A Soldier’s failure to abide by his/her conscience could be costly.

Often the question is asked why Soldiers make such sacrifices on the battlefield without regard for personal safety. Surely, this is demonstrated when a Soldier fighting in Iraq or Afghanistan and the squad is pinned down under enemy gunfire, when a grenade is thrown into their midst and the Soldier grabs the grenade and falls on it to absorb the blast. The Soldier forgets about himself and thinks only of his fellow comrades. The Soldier puts the welfare of his comrades before his own. In many cases religious beliefs, values and ethics play an important role in shaping the moral outlook of the soldier on the battlefield. Chaplain Daniel Oh suggested that religious beliefs and ethics shapes the moral outlook of a Soldier on the battlefield, when he wrote the following about the American Soldier, “In other words, his/her inner qualities, dispositions, and attitudes that are rooted in his/her being (or character) will eventually come forth through certain kinds of actions.”²⁹ At the core of this conscience are moral commitments, such as respect for humanity and abhorrence of cruelty.

In the final analysis, implementing the appropriate ROE is a matter of individual consciousness. Rushworth Kidder wrote there are sources that impact one’s decision making. Kidder wrote that experience, character, and faith motivate one’s decision making. It is a Soldier’s character that provides comfort that his learned values and virtues will be expressed there on the battlefield. The point rings loud and clear. On the battlefield, the Soldier’s perspective is shaped by his/her ethics, values and religious background. Beliefs, virtues, and religion speak directly to the conscience of men and women in uniform. Individual Soldiers, as well as their units, must be capable of applying the appropriate ROE in the area of military operations. It could have a significant impact on national security and government policies. The

citizens of the U.S. have every right to expect American Soldiers and their commanders to live up to highest ethical standard, when executing the ROE.

However, there are some who argue that future weapons will reduce the need for Soldiers. “Many well intentioned advocates insist more high-tech weapons systems will reduce the need of Soldiers on the Battlefield. But History- including very recent operational experience – does not substantiate that conclusion. Science and technology cannot account for the dynamic interactions of physical and moral elements that often impact conflict in unpredictable ways.”³⁰ Once again, a Soldiers’ ethics, values and religion may influence how a soldier executes the rules of engagement in combat. The Army has and will always be about Soldiers. “No matter how much the tools of warfare improve; it is Soldiers who use them to accomplish their mission.”³¹ Therefore, those who lead Soldiers on the battlefield cannot ignore the force of moral consideration in a situation.

It is true that the work of Prussian military strategist and thinker Carl von Clausewitz, to whom almost every military thinker still pledges allegiance, still offers words that are relevant for the Army of the 21st Century. The words of Clausewitz’s echoes loud and clear, when he stated, “War is fought by human beings.”³² The human dimension element is a major factor on the battlefield and it cannot be ignored. The human dimension element may very well determine success or failure on the battlefield and the appropriate implementation of rules of engagement. With this in mind, the Army must continue to analyze the influence of the human dimension. Nonetheless, it does appear that the Army is well aware of how important the human component is and its influence on the battlefield, as it attempts to address this issue in TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-7-01, *The U.S. Army Study of the Human Dimension in the Future 2015-2024*. The Human Dimension study is important. This study conducted by the Army explores human

factors in war across the range of military operations. The Army's ability to perform its mission depends ultimately on its human element.

“Soldiers, leaders and other professional specialists must perform effectively as individuals and as members of teams and units if the Army, the joint force and the National defense efforts are to succeed.”³³ Chaplain (MAJ) Dan Oh demonstrated this point in his paper, “The Relevance of Virtue Ethics.”

Who are American Soldiers? What sort of warrior should they become? The popular slogan calling them “mean-lean-fighting machines” serves to dehumanize them, totally ignoring their human side. They are flesh-and-blood human beings with feelings, emotions, passions, and concerns for their loved ones as well as for their enemies. Additionally, the missions they have to accomplish during both combat and peacekeeping military operations frequently place them in complex environments that pose a great threat to consistent moral behavior. In other words, they are encouraged to be moral individuals who must act responsibly in making ultimate moral judgments. As previously noted, the Abu Ghraib incident totally belied the supposed moral-fortitude of the soldiers involved.³⁴

The American Soldier is not a machine. For sure, the American Soldier is a warrior, but more importantly, the American Soldier is a human being. The American Soldier is a human being with feelings, beliefs, faith, values, and passion, all of which shape and mold the Soldier's character. The words of General George C. Marshall are as relevant for the Soldier of the 21st Century as they were in 1941. “The soldier's heart, the soldier's spirit, the soldier's soul, is everything. Unless the soldier's soul sustains him he cannot be relied on and will fail himself and his commander and his country in the end.”³⁵ The U.S. Army has a proud history of good battlefield conduct. It is without question that reflecting an ideal moral standard should be of highest priority for U.S. Soldiers.

Chaplains Advising the Commander on Religious Issues

Knowing the cultural and religious beliefs of a particular area of an operation may provide critical information to the commander on the battlefield. FM 1-05, Religious Support

states the chaplain serves as the conscience of the command. “Chaplains advise the commander on the moral and ethical nature of command policies, programs, actions and the impact of command policies on soldiers.”³⁶ Also, FM 1-05 states chaplains advises the commander on several key issues. “The chaplain is to advise the commander on religious and ethical issues as they effect mission accomplishment and indigenous religions and their effectiveness on the mission.”³⁷ In addition, the chaplain advises the unit the commander on accommodation of special religious needs and practices within the command and matters of unit morale as affected by religion. The truth is that military chaplains are not world religion experts. However chaplains, bring an abundance of experience, knowledge, and expertise to the command team. There has been a considerable amount of debate on how chaplains should carry out their role as religious advisor to the commander.

Joint Publication 1-05 states, “The chaplain serves as the principal advisor to the commander regarding the impact of religion on military operations.”³⁸ There has been a great deal written about the chaplain serving as a Religious Leader Liaison on the battlefield. In fact, there are some who think using chaplains as Religious Leader Liaison can promote religious freedom. During an event hosted by Georgetown University, entitled “Religious Freedom and National Security Policy,” Mr. Knox Thames suggested that military chaplains could be used to promote religious freedom, by using them as religious liaison. “The term Religious Leader Liaison is a term used by the U. S. Chaplaincy to describe diplomatic and mediation role in stability operations.”³⁹ In an article entitled, “Chaplains as Liaisons with Religious Leaders,” the author stated there are some fundamental reasons why chaplains were effective in interacting with religious leaders. Religious leaders usually engender strong rapport with another religious leader. The Command Security Transition Command Afghanistan (CSTCA) chaplains indicated

the one reason chaplains connect more readily with the ANA mullahs is because they are both spiritual leaders and military officers. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, chaplains and religious leaders are both people of theology and faith.

In his article “U.S. Army Chaplaincy’s involvement in Strategic Religious Engagement,” Chaplain (LTC) Ira Houck wrote “the military chaplain is distinguished both as a military officer and as a religious leader, making the chaplain an ideal representative of the command to serve as an intercessor with political religious leaders in stability operations.”⁴⁰ Houck argues that a more expansive role of the military chaplain ought to be considered in peace building when religion plays a role. Further, he advocates a broader engagement with a religious culture to include recognition of the strategic value of religious sites or sacred grounds, religious relics, their hermeneutical influences, religious rituals used to grieve loss and status and religious symbols. The religious culture is important because, history has revealed that religion can serve as a catalyst to bring about peace and stability on the battlefield.

On the other hand with all the support of using chaplains as Religious Leaders Liaison, there are arguments against using chaplains as Religious Leader Liaison. There are opponents who suggest that using chaplains as Religious Leader Liaison compromises their non-combatant status. “A problematic issue about functioning as liaisons with local religious leaders is that it puts chaplains in a position that potentially could comprise their role.”⁴¹ Their fear is that chaplains through their contacts with foreign religious leaders may unintentionally collect intelligence, thus compromising their non-combatant status. Commanders at all levels should use care and caution when using their chaplains as Religious Leader Liaison. Chaplains should not be used to gather intelligence. In addition, not every chaplain should serve as religious

leader liaison. Personal and theological perspectives may hinder chaplains from engaging with local religious leaders.

Whether commanders are in support of using the chaplains as Religious Leader Liaison or not, the reality is that chaplains are a valuable asset to commanders at all levels. Chaplains bring a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the command team. Commanders face numerous obstacles in the area of operations, political, cultural, and religion. The training, skills, and expertise that some chaplains bring to the table may well change the attitudes of the local occupants. There are many chaplains who have done well in engaging foreign religious leaders and advising their commanders. For instance, after initially arriving in Afghanistan, Chaplain Larry Adams-Thompson (deployed in Afghanistan from March 2004 to March 2005) organized monthly luncheons with military chaplains and local mullahs. The original intent of these meetings was to discuss concerns, build relationships and exchange information.

During the meeting, the chaplains asked the mullahs what they thought about the impact of all the outside actor's that have been in Afghanistan, including the British, Soviets, Taliban and United States and multinational forces. The mullah in charge of education for the province said they were please that the United States was helping further education in the country. He appreciated all of the schools the United States was building for Afghanistan, because in order for the nation to move forward their education infrastructure had to be improved...He added, however, that since the United States was only constructing public schools and madrassas, which are traditional Islamic schools, the impression persisted that the United States was more concerned with secular schools than religious education.⁴²

The information provided had nothing to do with ROE or combat operations. However, it provided awareness of issues within the operational area. Chaplain Adams-Thompson and his chaplains took these and other issues back to their commanders. This incident shows how chaplains play a significant role in advising their commanders on the influence of religion in the operational area. Situations such as chaplains having

luncheons with local mullahs can lead to agreements, harness the positive power of religion and help reduce the chances of misperception during conflict. In addition, such communication between chaplains and local religious leaders might lead to decrease in the risk of the conflict escalating because of poor communication and misperceptions.

The influence of religion on military operations cannot be ignored or overemphasized. Regarding the role in advising the commander on the influence of religion in the operational area, the chaplain has a unique and critical role. The chaplain can be a very valuable asset to the commander on the battlefield. Even if a chaplain is not used in the capacity of a religious leader liaison, the chaplain can provide helpful information to the commander regarding the influence of religion in the area of operation. In an area of operation, a chaplain may provide important information pertaining to local Holy Places. This includes tombs, synagogues, mosques and gravesites. It is the chaplain's expertise that could be used to elaborate on the consequences or the perception if Holy Places are damaged or destroyed.

Further, chaplains may provide information on loss of life. Additionally, the chaplains maybe able to provide information on how other faith groups mourn the loss of their dead. The chaplains maybe able to provide information on how other religious and cultural groups view honor and justice. Further, the chaplains' expertise may allow the chaplain to provide insight to the command in understanding the significance many cultural and religious ceremonies which occur in the area of military operations.

In addition to advising the commander on religious issues, the chaplain could assist in cultural training which builds the ethical culture of the unit. The Army expects its Soldier to uphold the highest moral standards. Professional ethical training from the

chaplain can only help to reinforce the Soldiers ethical conduct in the area of military operations.

The chaplain can be a very valuable asset to the commander in the area of ethical training and development. In many cases the chaplain has been involved in some kind of ethical study or training. Many chaplains have provided countless training to Soldiers on Morals/Values, Ethical Decision Making, Army Values and the Warriors Ethos. Over the years chaplains have demonstrated moral leadership as pastors, preachers and advisors in combat. Chaplains can provide educational training on the development of moral character for Soldiers, rules of engagement and Army Values. Further, the chaplain can be used to train Soldiers to demonstrate the highest standard of moral integrity as well as the skill to execute sound moral judgment when facing ethical dilemmas.

Finally, in many cases the chaplain is underutilized. Commanders need to assess their chaplain's skills and talents and determine how best to use his or her chaplain in the area of operations. The sound professional advice provided to the commander just might contribute to mission accomplishments. Many outstanding chaplains, of different faith backgrounds serve in the U.S. Army and are looking for the opportunity to assist their commander on the battlefield.

Conclusion

Throughout history, religion has played a major role in igniting war and violence. In fact, religion may be the most powerful of all sources of war. However, this research has tried to explore the influence of religion on the rules of engagements. In addition, the researcher has suggested that it is the soldiers' values, and belief systems that influence how he/she implements the appropriate rules of engagement and resolves a dilemma on the battlefield, thus, avoiding

military fiasco's such as the horrors of Algiers, My Lai Massacres, and Abu Ghraib prison scandal in Iraq. This paper has suggested that implementing the ROE is a matter of the consciousness.

As religion becomes an increasingly prominent and discrete dimension of our military engagements around the world, military and political leaders must continue to embrace the conversation about religion in areas of operations. The conversation should not only examine the role religion plays in starting conflict, but more importantly explore the role religion plays in the peace making process. The Army leadership has indicated that the Army be prepared to fight the next war and also seriously deliberate about the Army's role in preventing wars. Perhaps, when thinking about the Army's role in preventing wars, the Army should closely explore how religion can prevent wars.

Finally, former Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, wrote, "the experiences of the United States in Vietnam and Iran during the 1970's offer lessons that we would do well to recall today."⁴³ One of those lessons the U.S. learned during Vietnam and Iran is that religion counts. Further, the Former Secretary suggests the United States was not the only superpower that ignored the power and influence of religion in previous conflicts. The Soviet Union made the same error, when they invaded Afghanistan in December of 1979. Religion is a component that should never be under estimated. During, this period the U.S. under estimated the power and influence of religion.

As the U.S. military and their coalition partners continue to fight current wars and prepare for future conflicts, a portion of success will definitely hinge on how the commanders on the battlefield and U.S. policy makers address and interpret the religious component. There is a need to better understand the role that world religions play in

international conflicts and military operations. Today's military and political leaders must continue to address the key questions regarding the power and influence of religion on the battlefield. The military and political leaders must not repeat the mistakes of the past and underestimate the power of religion and faith and its influence on the battlefield in the 21st Century. With a better understanding of the power of religion and its role in conflict, the U.S. will be able to forge stronger and long lasting relationships with other countries.

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